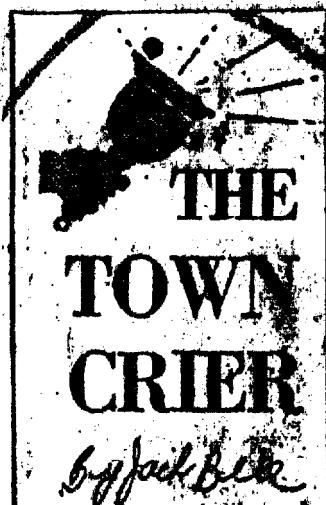


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"HE [sic] (FRANCIS GARY Powers) is a cowardly American," according to a statement attributed to John J. Wicker, vice president of American Legion Founders. "He evidently valued his own skin far more than the welfare of his country."

Such a statement makes me see red — and I mean the Soviet brand. Powers was flying a plane under orders high over forbidden Russia. It was unarmed. He was shot down, parachuted to earth and was captured. What was cowardly about that? The fact that the plane was shot down is proof the Soviets knew it was there. The inference is that Powers should have killed himself. Why? He wasn't a spy. He had no secrets to cover up. Every nation — foolishly, may I — engages in espionage. Powers' misfortune was that his plane disintegrated.

It's a free country and Mr. Wicker may say what he pleases. So may I; and I think his statement was contemptible.

Bygones. U.S. Prosecutor William F. Tompkins likened the trade of Powers for spy Col. Rudolf Abel akin to trading Mickey Mantle for an ordinary ball player. He called Powers "just a plane driver."

People on the street agree. It was a right good trade. Powers deserved the efforts this government put out to get him home — after sending him on a secret mission while President Eisenhower was having troubles abroad — remember? As for Col. Abel, let's admit he was a crack espionage agent. But he'll have one hell of a time getting back into the nation. I'd think his fate is pretty well shot.

Edwin Walker criticized. But that's not important. I'm only talking about responsibility.

CPYRGHT

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